



# FEMA

## *Safe Room Project Proves Beneficial*

**Stone County, AR** – The sound of cars rushing, car doors slamming and people hurrying to safety was the scenario at Mountain View's unified school campus as area residents made their way to the schools' safe rooms fearing the wrath of a tornado. As it pummeled the town, more than 200 residents, occupying the schools' safe rooms, remained unscathed.

Robert Ross, principal of Mountain View Middle School located in Mountain View, Arkansas, had an eerie feeling about the weather forecast on February 5, 2008. What he didn't know was that a tornado categorized as an EF4 on the Enhanced Fujita Scale would soon make its appearance and accomplish the feat of demolishing homes, up-rooting trees, zapping power lines and spreading massive loads of debris.

Most of the people that came to the shelter were area residents. "It just seemed to be the people from the eastern part of the town," Ross said. Tornado events are common to the State of Arkansas. According to the National Climatic Data Center (NCDC) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the state has experienced more than 1,600 tornadoes since 1950, with 239 tornadoes that were F3 and higher. With respect to tornadoes, Arkansas ranked third in the Nation in related deaths and fifth in injuries.

In an attempt at being pro-active Mountain View School District decided to build safe rooms in the elementary, middle and high school. They took advantage of FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) following the disaster declaration of December 29, 2000 (FEMA-1354-DR-AR). The safe room project was initiated March, 2002 and completed in April, 2004 at a cost of \$1,537,397. Mount View School District received a \$1,153,084 grant from FEMA through its HMGP.

The reinforced masonry safe rooms are massive. Total square footage in the elementary school is 4,200 sq. ft, middle school 2,400 sq. ft and high school 2,700 sq ft. Total capacity is approximately 1540 people.

Built according to guidelines outlined in FEMA Publication 361, *Design and Construction Guidance for Community Shelters*, the safe rooms provide a feeling of security.

Precautionary measures were taken to protect the back-up generators should the buildings lose power. The masonry walls surrounding the generators were raised to the height of the equipment to protect the generators from high winds and debris.

Though constructed to protect a student body of 1,300 students, faculty, staff and volunteers during the day, the safe rooms can also be utilized, after school hours, by individuals in the community seeking shelter from the storm.

"We've learned some lessons from the February 5 tornado event. We are going to be better prepared," Ross said. We are going to have water, extra flashlights and medical supplies stocked in the safe rooms. We're also going to share keys with some trusted individuals in the community and orientate them as to where the supplies and power sources are. We have already changed the locks on the doors to make them universal as well as added more emergency lighting.



Stone County,  
Arkansas



### Quick Facts

Year:

**2000**

Sector:

**Public**

Cost:

**\$1,737,397.00 (Actual)**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Safe Rooms/Community Shelters**

Primary Funding:

**Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**